



DIASPORA COMMUNITIES IN AUSTRALIA

*by Greg McLellan
November 2015*

Research and literature exploring Australia's diaspora communities have focused significantly on the differing waves of migration. However, much less attention has been provided to the cultural and social differences between these groups. The discrepancies between migrant communities and Australia's general population have particular relevance in regard to several areas within the interest of Australia's political policy. These areas include the ageing trend of migrant groups, their settlement within Australian society, and their religious identification. Australia's discretionary migration policies suggest that significant attention has been provided to the religious identification of migrants. The cohesiveness of diaspora communities within Australia is further jeopardised by the socio-economic burden imposed by ageing non-English speaking diaspora communities. Similar concerns arise regarding the concentration of such groups within suburban New South Wales and Victoria.¹

¹ All data on Australian diaspora communities in this document came from TableBuilder, ABS Census 2011.

Overview of diaspora groups

26% of Australia's total population are foreign-born citizens, and 15% of these citizens arrived in the last five years (OECD 2012). There is a clear distinction between new migrants from non-English speaking countries, and the early post-war migrant communities. Leading social scientist working in diaspora studies, Robin Cohen, explains this distinction by outlining four migration categories. He describes them as trade, victim, labour, and deterritorialised diaspora (Cohen 1997). While deterritorialised diaspora communities are not significantly represented in Australia's migration patterns, the remaining classifications provide points of comparison between Australia's contrasting migrant groups and their integration trends.

Cohen suggests that each period of migration has been characterised by a specific cause of migration. 'First diasporic wave' migrants are described as a product of British occupation and evidence of 'classic trade diaspora' (Cohen 1997). The case studies chosen for this wave of migration are the post-war British and Irish communities, as well as the Greek and Italian diaspora. Cohen's second, victim, category results from a 'dispersal following a traumatic event in the homeland' (Cohen

1997). The case studies chosen for this classification are the Bosnian and Serbian diaspora communities that immigrated to Australia following the 1990s humanitarian crisis. While the immigrant communities from Vietnam and Lebanon may also fit this classification, they have been selected for Cohen's third category, labour diaspora. This wave of migration emerges 'in search of work' (Cohen 1997), and is demonstrated by the significant growth of Vietnamese and Lebanese student and professional immigration (Department of Education and Training 2015). The final case studies chosen are migrants from new migration countries, including Egypt, Iraq and Syria. While a majority of these migrants can be classified under Cohen's labour grouping, it can be expected that a growing number of post-war refugees will immigrate to Australia. For this reason, it becomes necessary to compare the integration trends of diaspora communities across the various waves and classifications, to predict the public policy implications that will result from the existing and future diaspora communities.

Aging Trends

Australia's general population is currently experiencing an ageing trend. The current median age is 37.3 years. 55% of Australia's entire population are between the ages of 20-59 years old. Further, according to the ABS, only 25% of Australians are between the ages of 0-19. Australia's ageing population is the result of 'sustained low fertility and increasing life expectancy', which has resulted in proportionally fewer children and a proportionally larger population of citizens aged above 65 years old (ABS 2015). Therefore, over the next few decades, the projection of Australia's ageing population

is anticipated to have extreme implications on the country's health and workforce industries. While discretionary migration policy can have a reversal effect on an ageing population, it is clear that early waves of migration are now contributing to the growth of Australia's older population. Currently, Australia's foreign-born citizens are older than their Australian-born counterparts with 19% of migrant citizens aged 65 or over in 2011, compared to 12% of those born within Australia (ABS 2011).

There are significant projected implications as a result of Australia's current ageing diaspora communities. Specifically, there is expected to be substantially higher social costs for non-Australian born migrants, particularly those originating from non-English speaking countries. In 2011, there were 608,449 migrants from non-English speaking countries, totalling 18% of all Australians aged above 65 (ibid). A recent study regarding ageing Greek migrants within Australia found that a 'lack of language and cultural appropriateness among mainstream services' had contributed to barriers between migrants and these services (Newman et al. 2011). Ageing migrants are more likely to have low proficiency in reading and speaking English, resulting in an inability to benefit from social welfare, or a more costly engagement with these services. Voula Messimeri-Kianidis from the Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils projects that 'by 2021, 30% of older Australians will come from a [Culturally and Linguistically diverse] background. This group of people, on the whole, speak English poorly and rely on their language of origin for communication with service providers' (Messimeri-Kianidis 2007). Further studies have found that even migrants who do

speak English often revert back to their native language as they experience cognitive decline (Orb 2002). Migrants who have learned English as a second language will suffer from a deterioration of these skills (Thomas 2003), while studies have further shown that individuals with dementia will commonly lose their most recently acquired language (Alzheimer's Australia 2006). As a result, many ageing non-English speaking migrants will become dependent on their adult children or contribute to an excessive waste of State resources.

Migrants from Australia's first wave of migration have an ageing projection similar to the general population of Australia. While 55% of Australians are between the ages of 20 and 59 years old, 57% of first wave migrants fall in this category. Therefore, over the next few decades, it is to be expected that first wave migrants will contribute to an increased demand of social welfare and skilled workforce.

From the non-English speaking countries, Greece and Italy, currently 54% of these migrants are within the working age, and 25% are 60 years or older. While the study on Greek migrant's ageing population found a correlation with 'Greek cultural expectations' and a reliance on 'Australian-born adult children...[playing] a key role in providing parents with support' (Newman et al. 2011), currently only 31% of Greek and Italian migrants are between the ages of 0 and 29 years old. Therefore, it is projected that non-English born migrants within the workforce today are likely to create greater demands on Australia's social services in the future.

By contrast, the ageing trend within the Vietnamese and Lebanese communities is

less significant. Of these migrants, 60% are between the ages of 20 and 59, significantly more than the general population's average. However, almost half are between 0 and 29. Therefore, over the next few decades, in addition to new workers, almost half of the existing workforce will remain within the labour market. This may contribute to an alleviation of Australia's ageing population's projected demand for skilled-workers, as well as provide non-English speaking born migrants a valuable support network.

The Bosnian and Serbian diaspora communities both feature ageing characteristics similar to Australia's general trend. There is a higher number of younger migrants within this community than the general population, however only 35% are between 0 and 29. The disparity between younger migrants within the wave of labour migration and the humanitarian migrants may be the result of a variety of factors including cultural practices and lower fertility trends. Regardless, these numbers suggest that the post-1990s wave of migration will contribute to, and not lessen Australia's ageing projection.

This is contrasted by the wave of new migrants who have entered Australia largely within the period of 2000-2011. The age projection of Iraqis, Syrians and Egyptians living within Australia follows the same ageing trend. Currently 58% of this diaspora community are within working age. However, there are significantly younger migrants than the general population average. Within this group, 46% are between 0 and 29 years old, suggesting that the diaspora community of new migrants will alleviate some of the workforce demand and social burden that results from an ageing

population. It can be anticipated that a further intake of new migrants can assist in this process.

Geographical/Settlement Trends

Director of the Australian Population and Migration Research Centre, Graeme Hugo acknowledges the implications of diaspora spatial settlement, suggesting that ‘it exerts important influences on their social and economic lives..[including] access to work opportunities [and] access to goods and services’ (Hugo 2011). Therefore, while the concentration of diaspora communities can have positive social influences on a migrant community, it was result in adverse economic consequences.

72% of Australia’s diaspora communities currently reside in New South Wales and Victoria. This follows the settlement trend of Australia’s general population since the 1940s (ABS 2014). However, there is significant contrast between the settlement patterns of First Wave migrants and subsequent diaspora groups.

Across post-war and First Wave migrants, there is a clear equitable distribution of diaspora communities across New South Wales and Victoria. The largest concentration of British and Irish migrants within New South Wales is located in Northern Sydney, accounting for 19% of British and 9% of Irish migrants. Similar patterns exist within Victoria. This is contrasted by a slightly higher concentration of post-war migrants from non-English speaking countries. 21% of Italy’s diaspora community and 37% of the Greek community is located within Inner-Western and Inner-South Western Sydney. Therefore, the concentration of Greek migrants within New South Wales is almost

double British migrants. Similar findings are evident in the settlement patterns of Bosnian and Serbian migrants, albeit at a slightly lower rate of concentration.

Contrasting the post-war diaspora communities, there is a significantly higher concentration of Vietnamese and Lebanese migrants. 45% of the Vietnamese diaspora community, and almost half of Australia’s Lebanese community live within South Western Sydney. Similar numbers also exist within Western and South-Eastern Melbourne.

There is significant contrast between post-war diaspora communities and the new migrants from Iraq, Syria and Egypt. There is a much higher concentration of Middle Eastern migrants than that of members from European groups. 75% of all Iraqi migrants live predominantly in the regions of South-West Sydney and Parramatta. Contrasting the equitable distribution of Anglo-Saxon migrants, over half of the Iraqi diaspora within New South Wales and Victoria reside in only two suburbs of each state. A similar distribution exists for Syrian and Egyptian migrants at slightly lower concentrations.

There is much debate regarding the concentration of diaspora communities within suburban New South Wales and Victoria. Blainey writes that such concentration threatens the cohesiveness of Australia’s general population (Blainey 1993, 1994). Similarly, Healy and Birrell write of the “two Sydneys” phenomenon, where one is ‘dominated by low to moderate-income non-English-speaking migrant communities...and the other comprised of established inner affluent areas and predominantly English-speaking “aspirational” areas’ (Healy and Birrell

2003). Alternatively, other theorists suggest that such a concentration of diaspora communities is likely to have positive roles in 'assisting immigrant economic and social adjustment' (Jupp and Clyne 2011). Therefore, the concentration of migrants from non-English speaking countries is of particular relevance to policymakers.

Religious Identification Trends

It follows that a growth of migrants from non-European countries would correlate with an increased representation of non-Christian citizens. However, non-Christian migrants only represent 8% of Australia's population. The data suggests that Australia's discretionary acceptance of migrants ensures that non-Christian diaspora groups remain under-represented within Australian society. James Jupp argues that the under-representation of non-Christian migrants, particular those from Islamic backgrounds, is the disproportionate reaction to increased Islamic militancy, and the political sensationalism that has resulted. Jupp writes that more vigorous immigration controls for non-Christian immigrants 'was strongly endorsed by John Howard..[as he]...saw the political opportunity to reverse public policy without unduly alienating 'ethnic' votes' (Jupp 2011). Therefore, the under-representation of Islamic diaspora communities within Australia is more likely symptomatic of political forces, rather than influenced by concerns of integration. The under-representation of non-Christian minority groups, particularly of Islamic origin, is evident when contrasted by the trends of other diaspora groups.

Unsurprisingly, 84% of the first wave migrants identify as having Christian beliefs, and further 15% express having no religion. British and Irish migrants best reflect the trend within Australia's general population. Australia is predominantly Christian at 67%, followed by no religion at 25%. This is contrasted by Italy and Greece, which expresses 90% and 96% Christianity citizenry.

Religious identification from Vietnamese and Lebanese diaspora communities, reflect a disproportionate tendency to accept Christian migrants. Within the Vietnamese community, 52% are Buddhist, followed by 34% who are Christian. These trends are contrasted by the Pew Institute, which finds that 30% of Vietnam's population have no religious identification, followed by 16% who are Buddhist and only 8% who are Christian (Pew Research 2012). Similarly, while it is estimated that 54% of Lebanon's population are Muslim, followed by 40% Christian (CIA Factbook), within the Lebanese-Australian community, 52% are Christian and only 45% are Muslim.

There are many reasons to account for the divergence of trends within Australia's diaspora community and the statistics of their birth country. Notably, emigration from both countries occurred after periods of civil war. During these wars, political divisions, resulting in sectarian conflicts, may have shaped Australian policy to accept migrants of a minority faith.

The acceptance of Christians from Iraq, Syria and Egypt is disproportionate to the national average. Within the Egyptian diaspora community, 77% are Christian, while 19% are Islamic. This greatly contrasts the Pew Research survey, which

found only 5% of Egypt's population to be Christian and 95% to be Muslim. Of the Syrians within Australia, 53% are Christian, while 39% are Islamic. This again differentiates from the Pew findings, which attribute 5% of Syria's population as being Christian, and 93% as Islamic. Finally, Australia's Iraqi diaspora features a Christian population of 39% and an Islamic population of 51%. While a majority of this diaspora are Islamic, this contrasts starkly with the Pew study that finds 0.8% to be Christian and 99% to be Muslim.

Similar to the suggestions made for the disparity between the Lebanese and Vietnamese diaspora community, the predominantly Muslim countries of Iraq, Syria and Egypt, feature a recent history of civil conflict and sectarian violence. Therefore, the integration of disproportionate numbers of minority groups may be the result of a humanitarian political policy. However, there is also the likelihood that the acceptance of Christian migrants can facilitate greater integration and be receptive of higher public support. While the acceptance of largely Christian migrants can be seen to have a positive influence on the integration of these

communities, there are also significant concerns. In particular, the general assumption that diaspora communities feature a predominantly non-Christian identity may further contribute to the marginalisation of an already under-represented cultural group.

Policy-makers must not only be aware of the numbers and waves of immigration to Australia, but also the significant social and cultural implications that may result from these communities. In particular, the ageing trends of non-English speaking diaspora communities may have significant social and economic costs that can be alleviated with the acceptance of predominantly younger new migrants. Further, the concentration of non-English speaking diaspora communities is significantly greater than those from English background, and this is expected to have social and political consequences. Finally, while the religious identification of migrants largely follows the cultural trend of Australia's general population, this too can have implications regarding the treatment and representation of non-Christian diaspora communities.

References

- Alzheimers Australia, "Dementia prevalence and incidence amongst people who do not speak English at home." Report prepared by Access Economics, 24 November 2006.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, "Australia: Population Aged 65+ by Birthplace, 1971-2011." https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/11_2014/002_the_demographic_facts_of_ageing_in_australia_-_revised_0.pdf (accessed October 16, 2015).
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, "3101.0 - Australian Demographic Statistics." June Quarterly 2014. <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/Lookup/3101.0Main+Features1Jun%202014?OpenDocument> (accessed October 16, 2015).
- Australian Bureau of Statistics, "4102.0 - Australian Social Trends." <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4102.0main+features102014> (accessed October 16, 2015).
- Blainey, Geoffrey "A Critique of Indo-Chinese in Australia: The Issues of Unemployment and Residential Concentration." BIPR Bulletin: 9, July: 42-45, 1993.
- Blainey, Geoffrey "Melting Pot on the Boil", The Bulletin, 30 August: 22-27, 1994.
- CIA World Factbook, "Lebanon". <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/le.html#People> (accessed October 16, 2015).
- Cohen, Robin. "Global diasporas: an introduction." Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1997.
- Department of Education and Training, "Monthly Summary of International Student Enrolment Data1 – Australia – YTD." July 2015. https://internationaleducation.gov.au/research/International-Student-Data/Documents/Monthly%20summaries%20of%20international%20student%20enrolment%20data%202015/07_July_2015_MonthlySummary.pdf (accessed October 16, 2015).
- Healy, Ernest and Birrell, Bob. "Metropolis Divided: The Political Dynamic of Spatial Inequality and Migrant Settlement in Sydney", People and Place, 11,2: 65-87, 2003.
- Hugo, Graeme. "Chapter 1: Changing Spatial Patterns of Immigrant Settlement" in 'Multiculturalism and Integration: A Harmonious Relationship' edited by Michael Clyne and James Jupp. ANU Press, 2011.
- Jupp, James, Clyne, Michael. "Multiculturalism and Integration: A Harmonious Relationship", ANU E Press, 2011.
- Jupp, James, "Religion and integration in a multifaith society", in Michael Clyne and James Jupp, 'Multiculturalism and integration: A Harmonious Relationship', ANU E Press, 2011.
- Messimeri-Kianidis, Voula, "A Mosaic of Culturally Appropriate Responses for Australian Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background Elderly People", Cultural Diversity in Ageing 2007 National Conference, Melbourne Australia, 7-8 June, Melbourne: Centre for Cultural Diversity in Ageing. www.culturaldiversity.com.au/component/docman/doc_download/49-voula-messimeri-kianidis (accessed October 16, 2015).
- Newman, Lareen; Tsianikas, Michael; Panagiotopoulos, Georgia; Hurley, Catherine; and Walker, Ruth. "The Social Support and Service Needs of Australia's Ageing Greek Migrants." Modern Greek Section, Department of Language Studies, Flinders University, January 2011.
- OECD Factbook. "Indicators of Integration 2012." <http://www.oecd.org/migration/integration-indicators-2012/keyindicatorsbycountry/name,217269,en.htm> (accessed October 16, 2015).
- Orb, Angelica, "Health care needs of elderly migrants from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds: A review of literature". Report prepared for Freemasons Centre for Research into Aged Care Services, Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia, 2002.
- Pew Research Center, Table: Religious Composition by Country, in Percentages. December 18, 2012 www.pewforum.org/2012/12/18/table-religious-composition-by-country-in-percentages/ (accessed October 16 2015).
- Trang, Thomas. "Older migrants and their families in Australia." In Family Matters, no 66 Spring/Summer 2003.